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ABSTRACT

Project TAP (Tapping Achievement Potential) is designed to ameliorate deficits of mildly disabled preschoolers attending day care programs. Advantages of the TAP approach include a regular class environment, full day program, reduced training costs of day care teachers, and benefits of early intervention. Teachers in two demonstration classrooms were trained to assess children and plan instructional programs. Analysis of student gains in areas of gross and fine motor, visual perception, reasoning, receptive and expressive language, and social/emotional development revealed that project children equalled or surpassed the expected gain of normally developing children. Compared to nonproject Ss, project children exhibited mean gain scores consistently higher on the McCarthy Scales with greatest gain in general cognitive scores. (CL)

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DAY CARE AS EARLY INTERVENTION FOR CHILDREN WITH MILD DEVELOPMENTAL DELAYS

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I. Introduction

The benefit, including cost benefit, of early intervention with mildly delayed children of low socioeconomic status has been well documented in the Lazar study and by the High Scope Foundation. Savings in terms of remedial education and the benefit of unwasted human potential is well known to this audience. The longitudinal studies, notably Lazar's, of the effects of early intervention which have recently been published, have given many the illusion that we have reached some sort of "conclusion" regarding early intervention for non-organically impaired, primarily low ses children. I prefer to look at the present as a plateau rather than a summit. The needs of potentially educationally handicapped children are still with us--perhaps more pressing than ever. With dwindling resources and an apparent shift of emphasis in early childhood special education to the younger, more severely handicapped child, the field has tended to stagnate in developing innovative programs and practices for mildly delayed children.

We need some adrenalin--a renewal of effort if the children with whom we are concerned are to ultimately meet the demands of an increasingly complex and changing society. We need to improve instruction, examine curricular content, and most of all serve more kids. The time has come for a model that is cost effective and easily implemented in an existing service system for the mildly delayed child.

II. Rationale for TAP

Given the numbers of children currently served in day care and the potential numbers of them requiring early intervention coupled with the current economic squeeze it seemed to be most prudent to provide early childhood special education in day care rather than establish new programs.

In North Carolina there are 82,763 children enrolled in day care centers. An additional 27,000 are in home day care plans. North Carolina, which has 3 percent of all children under age six in the nation, has 6 percent of all children in day care in the nation. While North Carolina has permissive special education for children under six, only about 5,000 are served by the public schools. The Department of Human Resources/Divison of Mental Retardation serves about 1,600 moderately handicapped children. Head Start serves approximately 9,000 children in North Carolina. The child who has mild developmental delays is not receiving services from the state.

Two other statistics which are relevant to this population are: 1) North Carolina has the highest percentage of working mothers in the nation; and 2) North Carolina has one of the lowest per capita incomes in the nation.

As these data suggest, most mildly handicapped children are being served inadequately and inappropriately in service programs designed as health or social service oriented programs (day care).

Because of the needs presented by such a hugh day care population and the lack of services for mildly handicapped preschoolers, Project TAP, An Early Aid Demonstration Model of Comprehensive Services for Preschool Handicapped Children was conceptualized and received funding by Handicapped Children's Early Education Program in July 1980. Tapping Achievement Potential (TAP) has as its focus the amelioration of deficits in mildly delayed youngsters in day care settings.

Project TAP established two demonstration classrooms in a local day care center in Durham, North Carolina for three and four year old children. Developmentally delayed and non-delayed children are integrated in the demonstration classrooms.

The Carolina Developmental Profile is used to assess each child in the areas of gross motor, fine motor, receptive language, expressive language, visual perception, reasoning, and social-emotional development. An Individualized Education plan which incorporates instructional activities from the Carolina Developmental Curriculum is developed for each child.

The benefits of the Project TAP model are:

1) Children are not stigmatized by enrollment in "special" programs
2) Full-day year round services are continued rather than part time or short-day classes typically provided in early intervention programs, which put the burden of coordinating other babysitting arrangements on parents who by necessity must work.
3) Children are educated in the least restrictive environment, typically in their own neighborhood and with non-delayed children.
4) Further, it costs less to train day care teachers to intervene with these children than to provide certified teachers with degrees. The literature supports the use of paraprofessionals and parents alike in successful early intervention.
5) Total intervention program costs are lower since much of the day care program is underwritten (especially for the lower ses developmentally delayed child) by other agencies.
6) If children receive intervention prior to their public school years, they are less likely to be labelled as "delayed" in the elementary years and "tracked" into programs for the handicapped. If they receive early intervention in a setting other than public school, it would seem that the likelihood of not being labelled in school is even greater.
7) While day care as it exists performs a vital function for children and families most day care programs are play-oriented. Restructuring

the day care program to more cognitively oriented curricula (i.e., improving an existing service delivery system) is much more efficient than establishing a new one.

III. Evaluation

The day care teachers in the demonstration classrooms were trained in the assessment of the children using the Carolina Developmental Profile and in planning instructional programs for the children using the Carolina Developmental Curriculum.

Project children were assessed at the end of the year on the Carolina Developmental Profile to determine gains. Results from the 1981-82 project year are depicted in Table I.

Table I
Average Gains on
Carolina Developmental Profile

	X Gain of Project TAP Children	Expected Yearly Gain of Non-Delayed Children
Gross Motor	5	8.5
Fine Motor	3-4	3.07
Visual Perception	3	5.16
Reasoning	3	4.0
Receptive Language	3	4.79
Expressive Language	3-4	3.42
Social Emotional	4	5.43

In comparing the mean gains of the children to the expected one year gains, it is evident that the project children either equalled or surpassed the expected gain of a normally developing child.

For project evaluation purposes, the McCarthy Scales were administered to the project children and a comparison group of non-project children on a pre- and post-test basis. All children were tested by a qualified examiner who was not a member of the project staff. The comparison children were selected because of their similarities to the project children, including enrollment in an inner city day care center. Table II depicts the comparison of the project group and comparison group on all subtests of the McCarthy Scales.

Table II
A Comparison of the Project and Comparison Group
Pre/Post McCarthy Scale Quotients

Subtest Quotients	Project Group (N=10)			Comparison Group (N=10)			Difference
	Pre X	Post X	Gain	Pre X	Post X	Gain	
Verbal	49.0	54.00	5.00	52.6	53.1	.50	4.5
Quantitative	43.5	46.6	3.1	48.4	48.7	.30	2.8
Motor	46.4	51.6	5.2	54.3	54.10	-.2	5.4
Perceptual	43.6	48.3	4.7	48.9	52.0	3.1	1.6
General Cognitive	94.4	101.2	6.8	99.7	103.3	3.6	3.2

Both the project group and the comparison group showed gains in mean scores across all subtest areas with one exception. The comparison group showed a decrease in performance from the pretest to posttest in the motor subtest. The mean gain scores of the project group are consistently higher

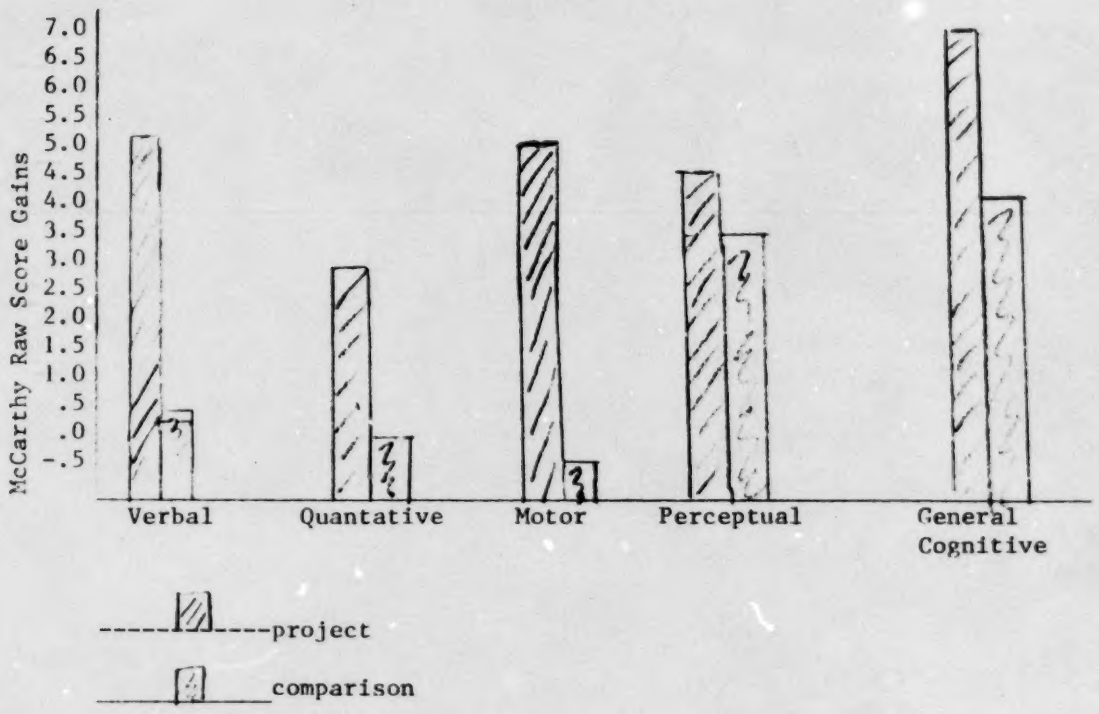
than the mean gain scores of the comparison groups. The project children showed the greatest gain in General Cognitive scores as did the comparison group.

The largest difference in favor of the project children, however, are on the Verbal and Motor subtests. The smallest difference between the two groups is in the gains on the Perceptual subtest.

The pre-test McCarthy scores for the project children were consistently lower than the pre-test scores for the comparison group. This was expected because the project children were selected and placed in the program on the basis of a mild developmentally delay. The comparison group, on the other hand represents a southern, inner city, minority population that does not have identifiable developmental lags.

If the two groups continued at the same rate of development demonstrated at the pre-testing, the McCarthy Scale scores should remain approximately the same. One might expect that day care would have less effect on the McCarthy scores of children that are developing at a below normal rate than on the McCarthy scores of normally developing children. In fact the opposite seems to be occuring. As shown in Table III, the Project TAP children have increased their rate of development more than the comparison group of "more like normal" children.

Table III
A Comparison of the Project and Comparison Group
McCarthy Mean Gain Scores



An increase in the rate of developmental growth can also be supported and documented by reviewing the pre and post tests performance of the project children on the Carolina Developmental Profile, the criterion referenced checklist used by the project for instructional planning. The results are represented in Table IV.

Table IV
Project Children's Pre and Post-Test
Carolina Developmental Profile Scores

N	Pre-Test		Post-Test		X Difference
	X	Range	X	Range	
10	46.9	5-66	84.0	31-97	37.1

The emphasis in the instructional program tended to be reflected in the degree of gain on the McCarthy subtests. In Table V, one can observe that areas in which the most lessons were used with the children corresponded to the largest gains in scores on the McCarthy

Table V
Instructional Emphases and Results

No. Lessons (CDC)	Gain (McCarthy)
155 Gross Motor 131 Fine Motor	5.2 Motor
115 Expressive Language 98 Receptive Language	5.0 Verbal
109 Visual Perception	4.7 Perceptual
81 Reasoning	3.1 Quantitative

It is evident that the children were able to generalize the developmental tasks acquired through the use of a developmental curriculum to the McCarthy tests.

Given the results of the McCarthy Scales combined with the results of the Carolina Developmental Profile, there is substantial evidence that the project's use of assessment and a developmental curriculum in day care had a positive effect on the developmental abilities of the children enrolled. Even though there are limitations in the evaluation procedures used these results indicate that the project children as a group did develop beyond expectations.

Conclusion

Project TAP has realized its goal of implementing a structured curriculum in a day care setting. The benefits of this approach have been demonstrated in the developmental gains of the children.

In this time of diminished interest and investment in children who are likely to be educationally handicapped, the model that Project TAP demonstrates is an alternative system for the delivery of services that merits consideration.